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SUBJECT: REFUGEE ISSUES IN RWANDA

REF: A. KIGALI 735
[1](#)B. BUJUMBURA 00572

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[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Rwanda hosts 53,000 Congolese refugees in three refugee camps and 2,000 urban refugees from various nearby countries. Standards of living in the camps are high, although land and sanitation issues are sometimes problematic. Although relations between Rwanda and the DRC have improved significantly (reflected by the arrival this week in Kigali of the DRC Ambassador, Ref A), refugees in Rwanda have not returned to eastern Congo in significant numbers and are unlikely to do so until the security situation there improves. There are an estimated 61,000 Rwandan refugees in host countries throughout the region. UNHCR and the Government of Rwanda have agreed to a framework that, if followed, will result in the invoking of the cessation clause for Rwandan refugees in December 2011. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On October 17-19, PRM Program Officer Wendy Henning and Embassy Kampala Refugee Program Assistant Annie Gacukuzi visited Rwanda to monitor UNHCR and American Refugee Committee's refugee camp activities. The following report is based on the visit.

Background

[1](#)3. (SBU) Rwanda hosts 53,000 Congolese refugees in three refugee camps and 2,000 urban refugees from various nearby countries. UNHCR/Rwanda has two main objectives - to provide protection and assistance to refugees in Rwanda and to promote repatriation of Rwandan refugees. Assistance partners include the World Food Program, the Government of Rwanda (GOR), UNICEF, the Forum for African Women Educationists, African Humanitarian Action (AHA), American Refugee Committee (ARC), German Technical Service (GTZ), and Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS). There are an estimated 61,000 Rwandan refugees in host countries throughout the region. (Note: This is an estimate because many Rwandan refugees, such as those in DRC, are not registered. End Note.) Over three million Rwandans have returned since the 1994 genocide, including over 14,000 in 2009.

Care and Maintenance

[1](#)4. (SBU) Standards of assistance in the refugee camps in Rwanda are high. Refugees receive regular food rations, health services are superior to the national standard, primary education is available to all school-aged children and sanitary/hygiene conditions are decent. (Note: Available land is scarce in heavily populated Rwanda. The GOR allocates

limited space for refugee camps, making it a challenge to maintain hygiene standards. End Note.) In addition to a basic assistance package, refugees have access to a range of community services, secondary education for high-caliber students, HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence prevention and response programs, and vocational training. Kitchen gardens supplement diets and fuel-efficient cook stoves reduce environmental damage. Although implementing partners argue that they need more funds, overall services in the camps are an example of what can and should be possible with adequate funding.

15. (SBU) Water and sanitation are subject to factors beyond UNHCR and partner control. Water systems in all three camps have the capacity to provide over 20 liters of water per person per day. In Gihembe camp, however, the water system is dependent on the national electricity company to function. Nevertheless, the average supply is at or above 15 liters per person per day and refugees are not complaining about water. Qperson per day and refugees are not complaining about water. Lines at tap stands are short and people are bathing and washing clothes without difficulty. Hygiene is a challenge because of limited space to build new latrines when the old are "retired," and this year funds were not adequate to keep up with the turnover. For example, in Gihembe camp the ratio of latrines to refugees is 1:27. UNHCR recently made funds available to partner ARC to help improve the ratio to 1:20 by the end of December. In addition, camp residents have taken sheeting used to shelter shower facilities, leaving them exposed and in some cases unusable. ARC has begun construction of mud brick showers to get around this issue, but it will take time to meet the need.

16. (SBU) The lack of land is beyond UNHCR and partner control and is an ongoing concern in Nyabiheke camp, which received

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many new arrivals in 2008. Per UNHCR, the GOR promised four plots of additional land to absorb the new arrivals, but only provided two. Some not so recently-arrived individuals are still residing in hangars. Fortunately, there have not been any new waves of arrivals in recent months, so the situation is stable. UNHCR is worried that the situation in the Kivus could result in a new influx and the transit centers will once again become temporary camps as the camps cannot accommodate additional people at their current sizes.

Rwandan Refugee Return and Reintegration

17. (SBU) The return of Rwandan refugees increased markedly in 2009. An unassisted caseload of about 14,000 returned, mostly from DRC. Some 10,000 were believed to have been living among (and, in some cases, were married to) members of the FDLR (Note: The FDLR is an armed, Rwandan Hutu rebel group operating in the Eastern Congo. Its leaders include former genocidaires and many of its rank-and-file were members of the former Rwandan Armed Forces and genocidal Interahamwe militia who fled to the Congo after the 1994 genocide. End Note.) The number of returnees from Uganda, around 5,000, did not meet GOR expectations of 20,000 and observers suspect that many among the 5,000 were Rwandan residents who went to Uganda in order to return and receive the assistance package or individuals who returned from Uganda, received the package, and recycled back to Uganda. While UNHCR facilitates repatriation, it does not have a reintegration program in place and the GOR has limited capacity in this regard. UNHCR provides transportation to the home of origin, a standard repatriation package (three months' food rations and non-food items), and limited routine follow-up. Returnees are not guaranteed access to land and shelter, though the GOR reportedly works with local officials to ensure they are well-received. UNHCR follow-up visits reveal that land is the number one challenge for returnees. UNHCR is also concerned that women heads of household and vulnerable individuals do not have access to adequate services and it would like to establish a fund to address

this group's needs. Additionally, UNHCR would like the One UN system to address returnee needs, but this is an ongoing dialogue.

Recent Rwandan Flight to Burundi

18. (SBU) Several hundred Rwandans reportedly crossed into Burundi in August seeking asylum and claiming to be fleeing insecurity and persecution. Government of Rwanda officials countered that many in the group left to avoid prosecution in Rwanda for genocide related offenses. After drawing criticism for its initial response, which included returning many asylum-seekers to Rwanda, the Government of Burundi is now reportedly permitting the UNHCR to investigate the claims of those who remain (Ref B).

Cessation Clause 2011

19. (SBU) At the EXCOM meeting in October, UNHCR and the GOR agreed to invoke the cessation clause for Rwandan refugees on December 31, 2011 if the GOR reaches certain benchmarks throughout the next two years. The four-step process includes: enhancing voluntary repatriation; pursuing other options such as local integration, granting migrant status, or third-country resettlement; conducting individual status determination for those who do not want to return or have Qdetermination for those who do not want to return or have other options; and conducting a review to determine if it is appropriate to invoke cessation.

Congolese Repatriation

10. (SBU) UNHCR/Goma claims busloads of Tutsi refugees with "zipped lips" have been spotted crossing the border from Rwanda into the DRC, while others herded their cattle across rural border areas. UNHCR/Rwanda and the GOR assert that no Congolese refugees have returned home, besides the usual handful that regularly goes back and forth to assess the situation. This year, according to one source (protect), there were also reports of eight adult refugees being recruited from the camps, perhaps by a rump faction of the CNDP to be trained in Uganda. (Note: Many Congolese refugees in camps in Rwanda had supported ousted CNDP leader Laurent Nkunda, who is now under house arrest in Rwanda. End Note.)

11. (SBU) At Gihembe camp, however, NGO staff members

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(protect) report that there have been noticeable refugee departures. They reported that some refugee program staff (mainly adult males, but including some male youths) had left the camp, the latter to go to secondary school in Goma. The youths, departure raised fears of possible recruitment.

12. (SBU) Most refugees in Rwanda want to go home, but not until there adequate security in the Kivus. UNHCR has no plans for a facilitated return at this time. There is a tripartite meeting scheduled for November to discuss the framework for the return of refugees. Program Officer expressed concern that this meeting will give the green light to the GOR to push Congolese refugees home, but UNHCR assured her that the High Commissioner has made it clear to the GOR that the situation in the Kivus is not conducive to durable and dignified return and the GOR must continue to respect its commitments to hosting refugees. (Note: The High Commissioner was visiting Rwanda, after a visit to the DRC, at the same time as Program Officer. End Note.) Some local Rwandan media report an imminent return for Congolese refugees, suggesting a lack of understanding of the gravity of the humanitarian and security conditions in eastern DRC that belies the widespread belief in Rwanda that the political rapprochement between Rwanda and the DRC has greatly improved the situation throughout the Kivus.

13. (SBU) UNHCR, the GOR, and the international community

should continue to monitor the situation closely and communicate regularly accurate information about the conditions in the DRC and the prospects for Congolese repatriation. That will prevent misunderstandings and false expectations.

SYMINGTON